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# Changing Votes through Changing Minds

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Evaluating a campaign that reduces negative stereotypes of immigrants

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is the qualitative evaluation of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition's "Welcoming Tennessee Initiative" and its efforts to reduce the effects of negative stereotyping towards immigrants in the state of Tennessee. It assesses the effectiveness of the initiative and the organization implementing it, in hopes of contributing to the growth and success of future projects that promote social change by reducing the effects of negative stereotypes. It reveals the powerful effects of discrimination within society, and the necessity for projects such as the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative to advance the efforts of nonprofit organizations that work for social justice. Although it is impossible to eliminate stereotypes and discrimination completely, the precedent set by major legislation will help establish legitimacy for groups (such as immigrants) that have been systematically denied power in society. The foundations of social change lie with the people, therefore true change must occur from the ground up. The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition will succeed in countering the force of discrimination by promoting a positive grassroots campaign that increases public awareness of the benefits of immigrants and immigration to Tennessee.

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The issue of American immigration has shot to the headlines in recent months as legislators debate the best approach to address the estimated 11.1 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States (Pew Hispanic Center). The debate is drawn heavily along partisan lines, but it seems all can agree that immigration reform must occur now to accommodate this influx of people coming to the United States for better opportunities in a global economy. Immigrants have historically not been well received in this country, and their arrival often brings conflict and controversy stemming from an American assumption of cultural superiority and a belief in Social Darwinism (Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations* 165). Often the perceived threat of competition for scarce resources, such a jobs and public services, can lead to negative assumptions about an immigrating group's status and the formation of group stereotypes (Fiske and Cuddy 249). This prejudice and discrimination has had a profound effect on the lives of immigrants, both legal and undocumented, leading to incidents of racism and ethnocentrism, as well as a demand for restrictive legislation that threatens their basic civil liberties.

In response to such treatment, immigrants frequently form coalitions and advocacy groups to protect their rights, assist the needs of immigrant groups, and promote legislation and policy changes that advance the welfare of the United States' foreign-born population. The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) is a network of individuals and organizations formed in 2001 that supports immigrants and refugees in Tennessee as well as nationally, regardless of citizenship status. TIRRC members believe that all people deserve to be protected under the basic civil liberties on which the United States was founded, and that to achieve this protection, immigrants and refugees must be empowered through grassroots leadership, policy change, and public awareness. Public awareness is key to combating

xenophobic backlashes, such as the restrictive immigrant quotas of the 1920s that ended large-scale European immigration and the post-September 11th nativist sentiments that have led to personal attacks on naturalized American citizens. Such incidents have increasingly occurred in Tennessee, and there have been rapid increases in the state's foreign-born population in the past fifteen years. Tennessee had the 6th fastest rate of immigrant growth between 1990 and 2000 and the 4th fastest rate of Latino growth (U.S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000 Brief*). In November of 2005, TIRRC launched a program called "The Welcoming Tennessee Initiative," modeled after a similar successful initiative in Iowa designed to create a positive voice for immigrants amidst the rapid growth of anti-immigrant sentiment.

The purpose of this research study is the qualitative evaluation of TIRRC's efforts to reduce the effects of negative stereotyping towards immigrants in the state of Tennessee. I will assess the effectiveness of the initiative and the organization implementing it, in hopes of contributing to the growth and success of future projects that promote social change by reducing the effects of negative stereotypes.

## ASSESSMENT OF THE LITERATURE

### The Sociological Understanding

In any discussion of ethnic relations, it is important to define and distinguish between the concepts of race and ethnicity, which are frequently confused with one another because many groups of people that are today known as ethnic groups were once defined as races. Biologically, race is used as a means for categorizing human groups based on "certain hereditary characteristics" that set them apart. However, because there are endless possibilities for the chosen characteristics and humans interbreed to create new physical types all the time, there is

"almost no accord among biologists, geneticists, physical anthropologists, and physiologists concerning either the term's meaning or its significance. (Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations* 25-26)

The concept of race has therefore survived as a "social construction of reality," used to implement systems of privilege and oppression. Skin pigmentation has been given social relevancy in American society, and the experiences a person with lighter skin versus a person with darker skin are made "real" by its recognition as a means to categorize people. (Johnson 17-18) Ethnicity and ethnic groups are newer concepts that define human groups by their "ascribed characteristics" usually pertaining to "national origin, cultural distinctiveness, racial characteristics, or religious affiliation" (Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations* 15, 26). So while ethnic groups may at times share common physical traits, ethnicity cannot be determined by appearance alone.

This understanding of ethnic groups is important because "patterns of dominance and subordination characterize all multiethnic societies in the modern world." As groups of people move across national boundaries or as "new political boundaries" are created, ethnic groups experience one another's language and culture, and ethnic stratification systems result. The most common way ethnic groups interact with one another is through voluntary immigration. As each new ethnic group arrives, it receives a place in the social hierarchy, with greater cultural distance from the dominant group resulting in a lower position. The other forms of movement and interaction are conquest, annexation, and involuntary immigration, all of which imply movement that does not necessarily involve the choice of the transferred party. (Marger, *Social Inequality* 284-285)

Lieberson and Noel have theorized about the reasons for the occurrence of ethnic stratification. Lieberson suggested it results from the form of initial contact, whether it is "the subordination of the native population by a more powerful migrant group," or "the subordination of a migrant population by an indigenous ethnic group." Noel proposed that competition for resources, ethnocentrism, and differential power respectively provide the impetus, ethnic divide, and capability for one group to dominate another. (ctd. in Marger, *Social Inequality* 285-286)

According to these theories, ethnic stratification occurs when one group exercises consistent, sustained power over another. As Marger states, "It is not enough, however, to simply proclaim that the dominant group is more powerful...We must also look at the specific techniques by which dominance and subordination occur." Dominant groups use prejudice, or "negative ideas regarding subordinate ethnic groups and ideas expressing the superiority of the dominant group" and discrimination, a series of actions used by the dominant group against the subordinate group "including avoidance, denial, threat, or physical attack" to systematically subordinate other ethnic groups and maintain systems of privilege and oppression for long periods of time. (Marger, *Social Inequality* 73-74)

Stereotypes are a key element of prejudice, and can be defined as "overly simplistic and exaggerated beliefs about a group, generally acquired secondhand and resistant to change" (ctd. in Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations* 77). A 2002 study about the origins of group stereotypes suggests that "groups array in a space defined by perceived competition and perceived group status" (ctd. in Fiske and Cuddy 249). Fiske and Cuddy assess that when there is a large influx of immigrants to a new country, the citizens of that country make inferences about the group's intentions and their capability of carrying out those intentions based on their social status. People infer a "lack of warmth, friendliness, and trustworthiness" from their perceived competition and

"competence" from others' perceived status. (249) According to this research, there is also a basic assumption that "traits reflect social status," which may "help justify the system" and "legitimate power-prestige rankings." (qtd. in Fiske and Cuddy 249)

**Theories of Migration**

Neoclassical economic micro and macro theories of international migration propose that immigration is the result of "differentials in wages and employment conditions...and generally conceives the movement as an individual decision for income maximization." The "new economics of migration" theory challenges the assumption that economic decisions are made not by individuals, but by larger units or groups, such as families, that are acting to maximize income and minimize risks for the whole group. Finally, dual labor market theory and world systems theories take a macro perspective that analyzes immigrants' role in modern industrial economies and as a "natural consequence of economic globalization and market penetration across national boundaries," respectively. There is no comprehensive theory of international migration, but its complex nature suggests that a multi-disciplined theory will be needed to completely understand the factors that produce international migration. (Massey, *Theories of International Migration* 432) Neoclassical economic theories and new economics of migration theory suggest that governments are able to control flows of migration based on their policies and economic changes that affect the flow of income (Massey, *Theories of International Migration* 434, 436, 440). Dual labor market theory and world systems theory, however, propose that governments have little to no effect on international migration because the demand for labor is "built into modern, post-industrial economies" and is a part of the new global economy, and

could only be affected by major changes to the world's economic organization (Massey, *Theories of International Migration* 444, 448).

**A Brief History of Immigration in the United States**

The multiethnic nature of the American population is one of the defining characteristics of the United States. Every ethnic group but Native Americans traces it origins to other societies (Marger, *Social Inequality* 263). Voluntary immigration to the United States can be defined in a few key waves that define the major dates of entry for specific immigrant groups. African-Americans are the major exception here, because they are the only ethnic group to enter the United States involuntarily, and "In many ways, the vestiges of slavery continue to influence the adaptive patterns of the African American population" (Marger, *Social Inequality* 268).

British settlers were the original immigrant group to the United States, giving them "many privileges and prerogatives," and many major institutions still reflect this influence today, such as the use of the English language and the dominance of Protestantism (Marger, *Social Inequality* 264). The first major wave of "non-British immigration" to the United States came during 1820-1880, and was dominated by the arrival of the Germans and the Irish, with continued immigration from Britain and other northwestern European societies (Marger, *Social Inequality* 265). The second major wave of immigration lasted from 1880 until the beginning of World War I, and consisted of almost 25 million European immigrants. These immigrations largely hailed from southern and eastern Europe, and were also of lower class origins than the Irish and Germans that came before them. By the early 1920s, restrictive quotas were in place that ended massive waves of immigration. These quotas were largely motivated by "notions of

Social Darwinism" as well as "nativist feelings and racist theories" on behalf of native-born American citizens (Marger, *Social Inequality* 266).

**Modern Immigration**

Although Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans both have origins in the United States dating back to the nineteenth century, they represent the bulk of immigration to the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Marger, *Social Inequality* 272, 274). Over half of today's immigrants hail from Latin America and a quarter from Asia (Jacoby 6). The majority of Hispanic Americans originate from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Mexican immigrants have for the most part come to the United States voluntarily, with the exception of the annexation of California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Arizona after the Mexican War of 1848, as well as Texas a few years earlier. During the nineteenth century, Mexicans immigrated to the United States to work as unskilled labor in the railroad, mining, and agriculture industries. And when Americans began to move westward in the spirit of manifest destiny, Mexicans immigrated in even greater numbers as the economic and political stability of Mexico diminished. (Marger, *Social Inequality* 272) Puerto Ricans began arriving in the United States in large numbers during the 1950s, and are not technically considered immigrants because of Puerto Rico's status as a U.S. territory. Puerto Ricans have encountered prejudice and discrimination based on skin color in the United States that does not exist in Puerto Rico, due to high intermarriage rates over several generations. (Marger, *Social Inequality* 273) Cuban immigrants have largely had a much different and more positive experience then Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, mostly because the earliest immigrants from Cuba were political refugees of Fidel Castro's socialist Cuba during the Cold War. These immigrants were welcomed with open arms,

and their typically higher class status and better education allowed them more social mobility. Later immigrants of the 1980s were less skilled and racially mixed so their assimilation was less smooth, but still had the advantage of earlier Cuban immigrants offering jobs and assistance. (Marger, *Social Inequality* 274)

Because modern immigrants are predominantly of non-European origin, their presence is more highly visible among the Euro-American majority than previous immigrant groups of the 19th and 20th centuries, making their racial and ethnic differences seem greater and presenting new challenges to immigrants' social assimilation as well as economic integration (Marger, *Social Inequality* 279). Viewed as a threat to the "American social fabric," non-European immigrants bring a host of cultural and physical differences that often spawn fears of their inability to assimilate or potential to be a "drag" on society (Marger, *Social Inequality* 278). While these fears are largely unfounded, with the vast majority of immigrants assimilating into American society within a few generations, "the absorption of immigrants has been a persistent issue of American social history…the acceptance of new groups has been countered with a tradition of protectionism, which has manifested itself repeatedly in efforts to limit or exclude newcomers for both economic and ethnocentric motives" (Marger, *Social Inequality* 279).

Immigrants can roughly be separated into four types: labor migrants, professional immigrants, entrepreneurial immigrants, and refugees, which are divided by a series of common socioeconomic traits and reasons for departure (Portes and Rumbaut 14-23). Groups with especially low social status in the United States, such as the labor migrants, receive this status due to the assumptions that their poverty is caused by a lack of motivation and skill. Most immigrants move because they are aware of "the gap between aspirations and local realities" in their own countries and are "the most determined to overcome this situation." Those that are

higher in the social strata tend to have a greater education and awareness of the opportunities available in developed nations, as well as the means to migrate. Globalization has led to a rapid spread of the American "culture of consumption," and many people have learned about better economic opportunities available in the United States and desire to obtain "the American dream" of individual success. (Portes and Rumbaut 12-14)

One of the greatest perceived social threats of immigrants is the threat to language. Many people fear that new immigrants, if given the opportunity to avoid learning English, will create a "linguistically divided" United States. There is much resistance to the need for multilingual ballots, signs, classrooms, drivers' exams, manuals, and other public services and resources, even though many first-generation immigrants become full citizens and may require these things to participate in society. Despite these debates, studies show that children of immigrants adopt English as their native language anyway and "an inevitable shift to English has been characteristic of every previous immigrant group" (Marger, *Social Inequality* 278). The economic impact of immigration is also a widely disputed topic in the United States. These debates tend to correlate with the health of the American economy and the rate of unemployment. In troubled economic times, immigrants are often perceived as a greater threat to the availability of jobs because of their willingness to work longer hours for less pay. (Marger, *Social Inequality* 277)

The ability of new immigrants to assimilate into American culture is one of the central concerns native-born Americans have about the new arrivals to their communities. The word *assimilation* often comes with negative connotations of homogenizing and erasing cultures, but contemporary sociologists Nee and Alba have attempted to redefine ethnicity as a social boundary, and assimilation is nothing more than the fading of that boundary, with elements from

both cultures becoming a part of the newly defined mainstream (87-98). The key components and indicators of assimilation for immigrant groups are education, jobs, language, home ownership, citizenship, and the intermarriage rate (Jacoby 17-32). Every immigrant group that has come to America voluntarily has eventually assimilated into American society. Germans and Irish of the first wave faced less difficulty assimilating (despite being Catholic) because they were "close enough culturally to assimilate within a relatively short time, and they were physically indistinct from the Europeans who had preceded them to America" (Marger, *Social Inequality* 265). The second wave experienced a greater challenge because of their lower social class and predominant Catholic and Jewish traditions, but by the third generation "most have substantially disposed of traditional ethnic cultural ways" and assimilated into the American mainstream, socially and structurally (Marger, *Social Inequality* 267).

Because of the heightened "visibility" of today's immigrants, the ability to assimilate may be affected by racial discrimination and segregation. There is still widely recognized discrimination in the real estate market (Massey, *The American Side of the Bargain* 117), and Tamar Jacoby has suggested that there are several "Cultural factors that conspire against assimilation: everything from the internet and niche advertising to color-coded identity politics" (7). Children are on of the most important keys to an ethnic group's assimilation, but according to the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), children are learning to "racialize their identities" and identify less as "hyphenated nationalities" and more as "pan-ethnic identifications" such as Asian or Hispanic (Portes 158).

A pamphlet[1] by the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition discusses much of the research that illustrates the positive impacts modern immigration has on American society.

[1] At the writing of this report, this pamphlet is still in development and not yet officially distributed. The bullet numbers are subject to change.

A study done by the National Academy of Sciences suggests that immigrants may add as much as ten billion dollars to the United States economy each year, and a Manhattan Institute study indicates that for every one job filled by a migrant worker, three more are created elsewhere in the economy (Bullet 8). The National Academy of Sciences also reports that the Social Security System will receive net benefits of nearly five hundred billion dollars between 1998-2022 if immigration levels remain constant, and the number will reach two trillion dollars by 2072 (Bullet 9). The native born population is also becoming more educated, with only 10% of American men dropping out of high school to join the low-skilled labor force (as compared to 50% in 1960), creating a need for an outside labor force to fill the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' estimate of ten million unfilled jobs in 2010 (Bullet 10). And in Tennessee, despite a 168% increase in the foreign born population, the unemployment rate decreased from 5.3% to 4.0% (Bullet 10). The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) reports that foreign-born scientists and engineers make up 28% of doctoral degrees that are currently doing research and development, a large portion of the scientific development of the United States (Bullet 11). Immigrants also represent much of the small business entrepreneurship in the United States. *Inc. Magazine* reported that 12% of the Inc. 500, which are the fastest growing corporations in America, was founded by immigrants (Bullet 12).

Today's projections estimate that one third of all Americans will be Asian or Latino by 2050 (Jacoby 6), and Hispanics, who are not of any "race," have already surpassed African-Americans as the largest minority group (U.S. Census Bureau News). The paralyzing effects of racial prejudice and discrimination are presenting new challenges to the assimilation of today's immigrants into American society. Groups like the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition are working to combat the effects of negative stereotyping and discrimination that

threaten the welfare and livelihoods of immigrants and refugees that come to America to live and work in peace.

## METHODS

The research was done as a participant-observation study, designed to be a qualitative evaluation of the effectiveness of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition's Welcoming Tennessee Initiative in achieving its goals of changing negative immigrant stereotypes in Tennessee. Observations were recorded during a period from January to April in 2006, documenting activities, interactions, and assignments done as an unpaid intern to the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative, with specific focuses on Eastern Tennessee. The research was always done in a field setting, observing events in the natural environment in which they occurred.

The two components of the study are participation and observation. Participation was essential in creating an empathetic understanding of the subjective experiences of the organizers and participants interested in effecting change (Monette 222). This gave a better understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of advocacy work within a non-profit setting and the reasoning behind decisions and actions. By participating in TIRRC activities as an intern as well researcher with a critical consciousness, observation could be done to note and record the activities and interactions of TIRRC directors, organizers, and volunteers in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in realizing the goals of the Initiative. Assignments, and thus the bulk of interaction with TIRRC leadership, came from the director, policy director, and most importantly the public awareness coordinator, with whom I had the greatest amount of contact. In discussions and meetings, these experienced activists gave valuable insight to developments in the project, as well as personal opinions about the ever-changing and unpredictable needs of an undertaking

like the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative. Objectivity was maintained through an open understanding with TIRRC directors and organizers that the internship was part of a larger research project evaluating the effectiveness of TIRRC and its Welcoming Tennessee Initiative, and oral consent was given that the internship could be done as part of a larger research study. TIRRC membership therefore had a shared interest in the success of the research study in order to improve future pro-immigrant advocacy campaigns and the work of other similar organizations working for social change.

The specific tasks of the internship were not determined prior to the research study, but would entail working approximately five and ten hours a week helping to meet the needs of the Initiative as they arose. While the TIRRC main offices are located in Nashville, there was weekly correspondence about research assignments and work with activities located in Eastern Tennessee. The majority of the work was done with the East Tennessee Welcoming Committee, which is a division of the Initiative responsible for spreading the initiative's positive message about immigrants on a grassroots level in its assigned region. Responsibilities included assisting in the coordination of monthly Welcoming Committee meetings by contacting members, arranging meeting times and locations, assembling packets of information, creating flyers, and recording meeting activities. In order to create a strategic plan to implement the Initiative, the internship also included research of election results, demographics, and local organizations. Another key task was designing a basic training program that could be used to train committee members to educate about immigration on a grassroots level, or at least serve as a skeleton outline for future training programs. The initial intent of this assignment was to develop *and* implement the training program before the launch of the initiative in May, but as the preparations

for the launch progressed the differing needs of the regional Welcoming Committees caused directors to revaluate the method for distributing the message.

The next four sections examine the sociological understanding of race, ethnicity, ethnic relations, migration, and concept of stereotypes. It will also provide a brief history of immigration in the United States, and provide a more in depth look at the characteristics of the most recent wave of immigrants; their origins, reasons for migrating, and their social and economic reception to the United States. They are followed by an in-depth look at the specific characteristics of immigration in Tennessee.

## IMMIGRATION IN TENNESSEE

Tennessee currently has approximately 100,000-150,000 undocumented immigrants living within its borders, a relatively recent development with 58% of foreign-born populations arriving between 1990 and 2000, and 78% arriving between 1980 and 2000 (Pew Hispanic Center, U.S. Census Bureau: Census 2000 data). This rapid transition is due to numerous factors, but Tennessee's industrial and agricultural sectors have a high demand for low-wage labor, and immigrants cluster in locations such as these. Research has shown that "the influence of preexisting networks on locational patterns tends to be decisive among contemporary manual labor migrants," as many migrants tend to follow family and friends to specific locations because they can provide shelter and assistance (Portes & Rumbaut 33). Of Tennessee's foreign-born population, which is 159,000 people or 2.8% of the population, approximately 72% of those immigrants hail from Latin America and Asia, although Tennessee has immigrant populations from every corner of the world (U.S. Census Bureau: Census 2000 data).

The Latino population, at about 40%, is the largest foreign-born population in Tennessee, and also one of the most hotly contested. The influx of Latin American immigrants is not spread evenly over the state, however, but rather concentrated in a few rural, medium-sized cities which may not be as well-equipped to handle foreign born populations as the larger metropolises (Drever 13). Cities such as Bells, Monterey, Shelbyville, and Morristown have received large numbers of immigrants to their communities relative to their size due to factories such as the Pictsweet vegetable packaging plant, Perdue Farms and Tyson Chicken processing plants, and other agricultural and industrial plants that are major employers of Latinos (Drever 2). While Asian populations are also relatively high in Tennessee, representing 32% of the foreign born populations, their presence tends to come under less scrutiny and criticism because they are predominantly professional immigrants who come to America for higher educational strata and better employment opportunities, which is referred to as the "brain drain" from their countries of origin (Portes and Rumbaut 18).

Americans generally have a positive view of immigration as an abstract idea and a majority believes it is good for the nation today. However, Gallup reports that, "sixty-five percent are dissatisfied with the levels of immigration into the country today, and more than 8 in 10 want immigration levels decreased or kept the same." Although Americans have consistently disapproved of raising immigration levels in the United States, it does not rank highly as an area of major concern, compared to issues like healthcare and social security, although in recent months it has shown a significant increase (Gallup Poll News Service).

The events of September 11$^{th}$, 2001 spawned rise in xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiment in Tennessee and around the country. Several groups have formed in opposition to immigrant presence in the state, most notably the Tennessee Minutemen. The Minutemen Project

defines itself as "a citizens' Vigilance Operation monitoring immigration, business, and government,"[2] although the Tennessee division has since separated and reformed under a new name following the departure of its director and rumors of association with the Klu Klux Klan. (Wylie 17) There have also been notable anti-immigrant incidents in the state such as the arrest of a former Klu Klux Klan member in Chattanooga for making and selling pipe bombs to be used on buses transporting Mexican and Haitian immigrants, the vandalism of a Mexican grocery store in Maryville that was spray painted with swastikas and "WP" for white power, and a radio DJ in Nashville using his airtime to promote anti-immigrant myths and posting racist pictures on his website (Wylie 18).

There are also several pieces of legislation that are currently under debate on the state and federal levels concerning immigration reform, border protection, citizenship, access to public services, and programs to help communities accommodate the influx of immigrants. More than twenty pieces of immigrant-restrictive legislation have been introduced to the current state legislature, including bills that would prevent the translation of the state driver's exam, penalize employers who hire undocumented workers, and prevent undocumented immigrants from having access to public services. There are also pieces of immigrant-supportive legislation that would improve the availability of education for immigrants and build on Tennessee's driving certificate program that permits non-citizens to drive without a full license. In response to such legislation, the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition has rallied around the growing need for advocacy and protection of Tennessee's foreign born populations, and has built a successful grassroots movement to defend immigrant and refugee welfare since 2001.

[2] http://www.minutemanproject.com/

## The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition[3]

The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition is a Nashville-based nonprofit organization whose mission is "to empower immigrants and refugees throughout Tennessee to develop a unified voice, defend their rights, and create an atmosphere in which they are viewed as positive contributors to the state." TIRRC formed in 2001 as an alliance of grassroots immigrant leaders supporting state legislation that would allow immigrants to obtain driver's licenses without social security numbers. With the successful passage of that statute, Public Chapter 158 in 2001, the coalition continued to identify and integrate other ethnic groups into its membership and began to provide assistance in the areas of community organizing, advocacy, media strategy and organizational development/fundraising. The leaders of TIRRC decided to remain together as a coalition and identified five key areas of action that would help them continue to achieve the ideals of their mission statement:

1. Identifying and supporting grassroots immigrant leaders and groups throughout the state.
2. Uniting immigrant groups from around the state around common causes.
3. Creating a powerful voice in the public arena that is truly representative of the interests of the state's immigrant community.
4. Educating policy makers and the public at large about the positive contributions immigrants are making to the state.
5. Promoting unity and collaboration with other oppressed groups and the Tennessee community at large.

[3] Information contained in this section can be found on the organization's website: www.tnimmigrant.org, and information regarding the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative not found on the website was taken from internal TIRRC documents

The issues that TIRRC has made priority in achieving its goals are immigration, education, transportation, health care, refugee issues, civil rights, and access to justice. TIRRC stresses the need for comprehensive immigration reform and better access to resources and services throughout the state, especially in the form of multilingual access and information so that immigrants and refugees can receive the assistance they need and have a better knowledge of their rights in the United States. One of TIRRC's guiding principles is of self-empowerment and it strives to have the coalition be primarily driven by immigrants and refugees who advocate and defend the rights of fellow immigrants and refugees regardless of their immigration status.

TIRRC has focused much of its effort on legislative policy at the local and state level, but has participated in events on the national level as well. After the initial success of the passage of the state driving certificate law in 2001, the coalition has gone on to defend this law against numerous repeal attempts that have developed from a post-September 11$^{th}$ anti-immigrant backlash. Since then, they have devoted large amounts of time and resources to the more than twenty five pieces of immigration legislation that have been brought before the state legislature. TIRRC has continued to build its coalition through a variety of events such as annual grassroots immigrant and refugee statewide summits, State Legislation Receptions, and its own annual Statewide Convention. It has also assisted in planning or hosting numerous tolerance rallies, protest rallies, marches, and ceremonies to promote immigrant and refugee rights throughout the state in a unified, positive voice.

In 2005, TIRRC identified four broad areas in which to focus and guide its efforts for the future. These were: base building, defense of civil rights and civil liberties, grassroots policy change, and public awareness, in all of which the Coalition made progress and found success. It initiated Regional Councils in East, Middle, and West Tennessee so the Coalition could better

focus its efforts in different regions of the state. It also held several trainings in areas such as media, advocacy, and fundraising throughout the state with the assistance of allied organizations. It assisted in organizing public support for a Mexican woman who was told she must learn English or risk losing her child, a group of Muslim leaders after the desecration of a Quran in Nashville, and immigrant fast food workers being exploited by their employer. TIRRC also introduced two bills to the state legislature, defended against anti-immigrant legislation, led a statewide campaign to support immigration reform, continued efforts to create a Nashville based U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service office, and helped defeat a local Nashville ordinance that would have jeopardized the livelihoods of local day laborers. In November of 2005, TIRRC launched its "Welcoming Tennessee Initiative," the central focus of this study and a statewide campaign designed to educate Tennesseans about the contributions of immigrants in the state as well as dispel myths about immigrants and immigration.

The Welcoming Tennessee Initiative is a statewide public awareness campaign designed to improve the political climate in Tennessee by spreading positive messages about the contributions of immigrants in the state and dispelling myths about immigrants and immigration. Tennessee is experiencing some of the fastest immigration growth in the nation, which has left Tennesseans rapidly adjusting to a more diverse environment. Stereotypes originate from perceptions of a group's potential competition and social status, and can rapidly lead to a large gap between myth and reality. These factors coupled with the xenophobic effects of September 11$^{th}$ have led to a negative view of immigrants in the public dialogue, allowing for political exploitation and the spread of misinformation that has led to fear, acts of hatred and violence, and a hostile climate for immigrants and their families. The Welcoming Tennessee Initiative is a proactive movement that supports "empathy, hospitality, and neighborly treatment of immigrants

in Tennessee," and provides an answering voice to misinformed assumptions, anti-immigrant political platforms, and legislation that is borderline undemocratic and unconstitutional.

The Welcoming Tennessee Initiative is based on a similar, successful campaign in Iowa designed by the Center for New Community, a national civil rights group. It identified its focuses as:

- Vocalizing the already prevalent Tennessee spirit of hospitality;
- Fomenting respect and mutual understanding between Tennesseans and their immigrant neighbors;
- Introducing Tennesseans to immigrants' many contributions to our state;
- Dispelling myths about immigrants and immigration;
- Building new allies in the common pursuit of respect and for shared human rights.

## REDUCING STEREOTYPES: THE WELCOMING TENNESSEE INITIATIVE

The approach to the initiative is divided into two parts, *developing* and *distributing* the message. In order for the Initiative to be effective, the message needs to be clear and concise, summing up Tennessee values in the context of immigrants and their stories. TIRRC will recruit the "state's best communicators" to define the message. The initial intent of the Initiative was a single message that could be applied in multiple contexts, but consideration has been given to crafting messages that can be used in individual contexts, with different applications for churches, business owners, or community groups. Because of varying socioeconomic factors and personal experiences, people may have differing reasons for not supporting changes brought by immigration.

After the message is developed, the Initiative's plan to distribute it focuses on all levels of the state, using community networking, advertising in the media, seeking out "earned media" such as press conferences and letters to the editor, and political networking. One of most important factors of the development and distribution of the message is the necessity for a variety of supporters from various professions, political parties, organizations, races, religions, and regions. TIRRC is donating administrative, financial, and logistical support as well as assistance from its membership, staff and board, which includes a new position for a public awareness coordinator, hired in February of 2006. The public awareness coordinator position has been crucial to the progress of the Initiative, bringing needed guidance and attention to a project that is often overlooked because of the chronic understaffing and limited resources that plague most young nonprofit organizations. The Welcoming Tennessee Initiative is a project easily overlooked by TIRRC staff because its goals are more abstract as compared to its legislative campaigns or statewide conventions, and the pressure to "dispel myths" and "change minds" is less tangible than the pressure of a legislative deadline, although the goals of the Initiative are arguably more important than individual legislation for the long term benefit of immigrants. Bringing the Initiative's principles, ideas, and programs to other major TIRRC activities such as conventions or rallies may help bring it to the forefront.

To coordinate the Initiative, TIRRC has developed three administrative bodies. The Statewide Steering Committee acts as "the strategic and administrative core" that is responsible for the development and distribution of the message and managing its implementation. It meets frequently and consists of volunteers and leaders from various professional and cultural backgrounds. The Statewide Advisory Council meets only quarterly and consists of "representatives from diverse organizations that support immigrants in Tennessee." This

committee is devoted to the task of using its influence to "make the goals of the initiative a reality," as well as acting as ambassadors for the Initiative and building support within the respective spheres of influence. Finally, on the regional level, there are the Welcoming Committees, devoted to the Initiative on a grassroots level in East, Middle, and West Tennessee. These committees are composed of native and immigrant volunteers interested in educating and building relationships with community groups and organizations as well as training new volunteers and coordinate the regional outreach effort.

The recruitment of volunteers for the Welcoming Committees has presented a significant challenge to the Initiative, because the position demands more skill, dedication, responsibility, and time than other forms of volunteerism. Each committee needs a core group of volunteers who are familiar with the goals of the Initiative and provide a base for additional leadership and recruitment in the early stages. Although each committee chooses dates and locations for its meetings, many regional volunteers might drive as many as two to three hours to attend a meeting on a Saturday. This potentially large time commitment provides little guarantee of consistent attendance during the planning stages, which by their very nature can seem disorganized or uncertain while details are discussed and changed. The West Tennessee Welcoming Committee also experienced unforeseen difficulties during its first training session when facilitators discovered that several of the interested volunteers did not speak English fluently and would not be able to do community outreach to native-English speakers. TIRRC has taken steps to relieve the burden from volunteers and make the outreach process more uniform and less dependent on the individual talents of its volunteers. It is currently developing a multimedia presentation that can be used for group presentations to establish the Initiative's message in clear and concise terms, and can be developed to include more factual information or

more emotional appeal depending on the audience. In this way, a volunteer can play the presentation and only be held responsible for answering questions or providing updated information. Nonnative English-speaking immigrants can also pair with native English-speaking volunteers and provide a "face" to the movement with their personal stories and experiences.

Because the Initiative is a project of TIRRC, the coalition is providing its resources and leadership, but the sharing of resources and leadership accrued during the Initiative to TIRRC should not be a foregone conclusion. It is not necessarily a safe assumption that volunteers of the Initiative have the time, resources, or desire to participate in other TIRRC activities, and threat of this assumed recruitment may drive hesitant volunteers away. Therefore the Initiative should strive to maintain some independence, by creating separate channels of communication, such as its own email listserv. It has already taken steps in this direction through the online web log (or "blog") it created in March 2006 for gathering ideas and commentary from its members.

Despite the potential changes to TIRRC's grassroots education methods, TIRRC still intends to do formal training with its volunteers, using role-play techniques to help prepare educators for real-life situations. At the time of this research study, the training session was still under development, but other key sections of the training that remain under consideration include information sessions with updated immigration information, talking points, question and answer session preparation, and tips on how to prepare and handle unexpected situations. Facilitators of the training will be able to gather the most talented speakers for a "speakers bureau," which will become a pool from which TIRRC can draw a variety of educators from various backgrounds for its specific needs, such as speaking with a media representative or a government leader. This will help ease the pressure from TIRRC's central organizers and allow the face of the Initiative to originate from a wide variety of informed educators and advocates.

Another important step the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative has taken in response to its early struggles has been a relative step backwards. In order to approach the Initiative from a state-specific standpoint (instead of mimicking the Iowa campaign directly), TIRRC is conducting a small-scale test of the Initiative in a single county in Tennessee. Based on its relative size, proximity to TIRRC offices in Nashville, immigrant population, and other socioeconomic factors, Robertson County was selected as a test county for the initiative with a focus on its largest city: Springfield. While conclusive results cannot be made at the time of this study, organizers are currently gaining interest and support from businesses with large numbers of Hispanic workers and have scheduled meetings with the chamber of commerce and the local organization of human resource managers. It seems that many businesses that have large numbers of immigrant workers are already in support of the work of the Initiative because they realize the damage that some current legislation could have on their workforce, and can serve as allies during the campaign.

Until a more solid approach can be developed from the testing in Robertson County, the Welcoming Committees are not meeting. The already low attendance, coupled with the lack of repeated attendance has indicated that until a concrete plan is designed, volunteers will be unable to commit their time and resources. It is also important that TIRRC organizers seek new support from the community, instead of relying on the core group of organizers and advocates from other state coalitions and nonprofits that tend to frequent one another's projects, workshops, and forums. Many of these social justice advocates have good intentions for assisting the Initiative, but lack the time and energy to devote themselves to yet another undertaking. This overlap can also cause a conflict of interest between the various groups' schedules, projects, and resources.

Although the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative was slated to launch during April and May, this date will likely be extended until full consideration can be given to Tennessee's specific needs. By constantly reviewing the successes and struggles of the project, it has allowed for changes to its initial plans and opportunities to build on the program that succeeded in Iowa. Like all social justice initiatives, each project must be adapted to fit the individual needs of the community and its members, and TIRRC's flexibility gives hope for another successful campaign that can combat negative stereotypes and dispel myths about the contributions of immigrants and immigration.

## CONCLUSIONS

How does one measure the effectiveness of a project like TIRRC's Welcoming Tennessee Initiative? Is it in changing votes, or changing minds? Some social justice advocates might say success lies even in the changing of just one mind: just one person who comes to believe that immigrants have a positive impact on Tennessee. However, the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative is an investment into TIRRC's efforts and future, making the stakes of this campaign much higher. For TIRRC, an organization built on a tradition of legislative advocacy, the most important measure of success should be changing votes, which will be preempted by changing minds. The successes of this initiative could mean many things for immigrants on a personal level, but the broad overarching successes will come with key legislation that ensures the rights of immigrants in both the state of Tennessee and the nation. It will be impossible to eliminate stereotypes and discrimination completely, but the precedent set by major legislation will help establish legitimacy for immigrant groups that have been systematically denied power and rights by a system badly in need of reform.

The implementation of the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative could not have come at a better time for immigrants as the United States legislature turns its attention to reforming the immigration system. These reforms will decide the fate of the 11.1 million undocumented immigrants currently living and working in the United States, some of who now have children who are American citizens. The history of the United States has shown the devastating effect negative stereotypes can have on the populations they target, by producing dominance, violence, and a systematic denial of basic civil and human rights, and the successful work of projects like the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative will go a long way in assuring those parts of history do not repeat themselves.

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